

Route Sixty-Six

Part Seventeen

Esther

If I Perish, I Perish

(John 5:39; Esther 4:15, 16)

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:15, 16)!

Introduction

During a time of great turmoil and darkness shrouding the church and the advancement of biblical Christianity, over one hundred of the best living theologians gathered together to discuss what the Scriptures taught regarding the Christian faith. It was in from 1643 until 1649 that these pastors and scholars met over a thousand times. Many of their statements still form the substance of understanding of what it means to believe in and follow Christ.

In many respects the statements are unremarkable-that is, we take them for granted. But other statements are quite remarkable. One of those more remarkable statements is found in the twenty-fifth chapter, paragraph five. It reads:

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.

The first sentence in this paragraph should yield both humility and discernment. There are no perfect churches. The ease at which people

openly criticize the church is not terribly healthy. The way God addresses the church, even with its many faults, is often very affectionately (1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 1 Timothy 3:15). With an eye toward shepherding and guarding the flock, Paul accentuates his admonition by reminding the elders that the church is that which Christ has **“purchased with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28).

At the same time, error needs to be addressed. We are called to **“Test all things; hold fast what is good”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We need to **“weigh what is said”** (1 Corinthians 4:29). The synagogues of Satan did not become that overnight. It was a slow, step by step slide into darkness. But it is the second sentence I find extraordinary: **“There shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.”**

The Scriptures promise that the name of God will **“be remembered in all generations.”** He shall be praised **“forever and ever”** (Psalm 45:17).

His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And *men* shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. ¹⁸ Blessed *be* the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! ¹⁹ And blessed *be* His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory. Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:17-19).

There is a great and glorious promise given to the covenant people of God, represented by Israel in the Old Covenant and the church in the New Covenant. It is a promise that God will **“bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you”** (Genesis 12:3).

Of course, the blessing of God does not always appear to be on display. There are vast seasons in history and in our lives where God seems absent. With the Psalmist we lamentably sing:

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ² How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *Having* sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me (Psalm 13:1, 2)?

There are times when our souls feel like we are in a **“dry and thirsty land where there is no water”** (Psalm 63:1). As much as the natural mind

will resist the love, grace and wisdom of God, the lack of such knowledge is likened to a famine:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, “That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

I have little doubt that many of God’s covenant children during the time of Esther felt as if God had abandoned them.

A Survey of Esther

In many ways the book of Esther mirrors our current condition. Esther is a Jew (one of God’s covenant children) living among the exiles in Persia. She is one of the many victims of her people’s rebellion which resulted in a seventy-year captivity. Ezra and Nehemiah recorded the remnant of the faithful who went back to Judea to build the temple, the wall and reengage in worship, Esther is among those who preferred, as it were the comforts of captivity.

This should not be thought of as an indictment against her (or her cousin, Mordecai) individually. As an orphan female, it would have been almost impossible for her to make the journey to Jerusalem on her own. But similar to our current condition (no doubt worse than our current condition) we see believers under the power and authority of those who have no interest in the things of God.

It is of note that Esther is the only book in the Bible that never mentions God. But we should not conclude that God is absent in Esther. That we don’t see God does not mean that He does not see us. And it has been argued with great merit that the major theme of Esther is God’s providential care of His children though we never see His Name, hear from His prophets or see any miracles.

In chapter one we are introduced to King Ahasuerus. He is a powerful, yet fickle ruler. It is one thing when a small child is fickle. It is quite another when the most powerful person on earth is fickle. The Scriptures and history both indicate that Ahasuerus should be numbered with the Herods and Neros of powerful madmen. The context of Esther

contains the recognition that the lunatics are truly running the asylum. And they are well-armed.

Esther opens with the king throwing, as it were, a 180-day party where he was showing off his riches. But that wasn't enough. He also wanted to put his beautiful wife, Vashti (which literally means 'beautiful woman') on display. But she wouldn't have it so she loses her royal position and they begin a hunt for a replacement-a new queen.

In chapter two a new character enters the story, Mordecai. He is a Jew who had been carried away from Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. He was bringing up his orphaned cousin, Esther (who was also very beautiful). The king like Esther, though she did not reveal to him that she was a Jew. In the meantime, Mordecai discovers a plot to kill the king. She tells Esther who tells the king and the plot is foiled. Clearly now Esther is finding even more favor in the king's eyes.

We then meet the final notable character in Esther, Haman. He is a high official among the Persians and a hater of the Jews. For various reasons the king takes a liking to Haman and commanded that all would bow and pay homage to Haman. But Mordecai (similar to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before the golden image) refused to bow. It is worth reviewing the words of Daniel's three friends when confronted by the king:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 "But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

Oh, that we would all seek similar resolve!

Haman's response is quite severe. He decides that he will destroy all the Jews and hatches a presentation to Ahasuerus which the king casually grants, even though it meant the death of thousands of his own subjects.

Naturally the response to this is one of national sorrow. Mordecai is in sackcloth and ashes. He reaches out to Esther and warns of the consequences for her if she remains silent. Mordecai does not doubt God's

ultimate promise and deliverance. He realized that if Esther failed **“deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place” (Esther 4:14)**. But if Esther remained silent, she and her family would die. It is here where Mordecai offers the soul-searching question for Esther, **“Yet who knows whether you have come to the king for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14)?**

It is a healthy endeavor to ask ourselves when God has placed us where we are and how we should respond. Esther would fast and request it of others and she prepared for the very dangerous mission of petitioning the king on behalf of Israel. An uninvited stroll into the inner court of the king's palace could easily result in a death sentence, let alone questioning the choice of the king's favored servant, Haman.

Similar to Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, Esther throws her very life into the providential hands of God. She seems to take very little comfort in what her king/husband might do. But it is with a resolute heart and firm, yet no doubt quivering faith, that she utters the words, **“If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16)**.

But again, Esther finds favor in the King's sight. So much so that he offers her half the kingdom. But all she requests is a party, which the king gladly gives. She also wants Haman to be a guest which the king also grants. For some reason Esther extends the party to the next day. It is during this delay that two things happen: Haman notices Mordecai and becomes so angry he orders gallows be made; fifty cubits high (about 75 feet).

As the time, the king can't sleep so he has a record of the chronicles read to him where he is reminded that Mordecai had saved his life. He decides Mordecai should be honored. The plot thickens. Haman wants all the Jews dead, which would include the king's wife and the man who saved the king's life. The banquet becomes quite interesting.

As the banquet begins, the king asks Haman what should be done for a man in whom the king delights. Haman thinks the king is talking about him so he offers quite a wish-list (robes, horses, royal crests, etc.). Then the king orders Haman to give all this honor to Mordecai! And once Esther informs the king of Haman's plot to kill her, Mordecai and the Jews in the nation, he has Haman hanged on the very gallows built for Mordecai.

Esther ends with Esther being given the house of Haman and the plot of Haman being revoked. Naturally there is great joy among the Jews and also a fear of them because they were now viewed as protected. Purim is initiated, which is a Jewish festival celebrating their deliverance from

Haman. Mordecai is also highly honored. Similar to Joseph, he became second to the king...

...and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen (Esther 10:3b).

Christ in Esther

To be frank, I have found much of the proposed typology in Esther to be a bit strained. It might be suggested that we see Christ in the actions of Esther who enters the inner court and makes petition for her people. Truly, it is Jesus who enters into the presence of the Father interceding for us by virtue of His own blood.

Perhaps we see Christ in Mordecai who refuses the temptation to bow as Christ refused to worship Satan. We might learn of Christ when we read of Mordecai at the right hand of the king, utilizing that post for the **“good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen” (Esther 10:3b).**

But what strikes me above these things is how God used the sinful choices of evil people to bring redemption. What we learn in Esther is that there is a hand above all hands. There is a God in heaven **“who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).** And this is never more clearly seen than in the cross itself. As recorded in Acts:

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ – ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:26-28).

We are not left at the mercy of the random happenings of an ungoverned universe. As difficult as our moments might be, in a glorious eternity, when our eyes are truly opened to see the excellence of our Father’s Divine hand, we will praise Him for every moment of our existence, even our darkest hour.

Questions for Study

1. All churches are subject both to mixture and error. How does the affect your understanding and attitude toward church (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is one of the great promises in Scripture when it comes to the church (page 3)?
3. Are there times when God seems distant and as if He has forgotten you? How do you respond to such times (pages 3, 4)?
4. Review Esther. Why do you think there is no mention of God or miracles (pages 4, 5)?
5. What do we learn regarding providence in Esther (pages 6, 7)?